



DIGITALISATION STRATEGY - PROGRESS REPORT

Report by Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to update Members on the progress achieved to date on the implementation of the Comhairle's Digitalisation Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Comhairle developed and approved its Digitalisation Strategy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in November 2022, with implementation underway in April 2023. The Strategy highlighted the significance and opportunities arising from digitalisation, but also made apparent the disparities occurring from digital prominence.
- 2.2 The Strategic Priorities of the Strategy include:
 - People & Place – *providing a User-focused and collaborative service, that is transformative and inclusive*
 - A Strong Digital Economy – *Creating a skilled and digitally enabled workforce and supporting strong digital businesses*
 - Technology and Services – *Transformation through data, technology and cyber resilience.*
- 2.3 Following the significant criminal cyber-attack on the Comhairle in November 2023, an Incident Management Team (IMT) has been tasked with prioritising the organisational response to this attack which has accelerated the delivery of the Digitalisation Strategy across a number of key areas. Community outreach support and facilitation of increasing access and digital capacity is underway and remains an ongoing delivery priority.
- 2.4 A performance monitoring report based on the Digitalisation Action Plan is included at Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle note the Report and progress that has been made to date on the implementation of the Digitalisation Strategy.**

Contact Officer: Charlene Macmillan, Strategy Officer
Appendix 1: [CnES Digitalisation Strategy](#)
Appendix 2: Digitalisation Strategy Performance Monitoring

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	This supports delivery of the following Corporate Strategy commitments: - To develop a local approach to digitalisation that supports infrastructure, customer engagement and business development
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Comhairle developed and approved its Digitalisation Strategy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in November 2022, which highlighted the significance and opportunities arising from digitalisation, but also made apparent the disparities occurring from digital prominence.
- 5.2 To ensure that the Comhairle was equipped to harness the opportunities and thrive in this growing sector, the Comhairle’s Digitalisation Strategy was developed to embed a digital culture within the organisation and throughout the Outer Hebrides. The Strategy follows the same priorities outlined by [Scottish Government](#) and is reinforced by Audit Scotland’s [Good Practice Guide](#) characteristics of a digital council. The Strategic Priorities of the Strategy include:
- People & Place – *providing a User-focused and collaborative service, that is transformative and inclusive*
 - A Strong Digital Economy – *Creating a skilled and digitally enabled workforce and supporting strong digital businesses*
 - Technology and Services – *Transformation through data, technology and cyber resilience.*
- 5.3 The Priorities are further underpinned by several key principles which relate to Digital Leadership and Workforce, User focus, Innovation, Collaboration, Enablement of technology and data and Security.

DIGITALISATION STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 Following the significant criminal cyber-attack on the Comhairle in November 2023, the Incident Management Team (IMT) has been tasked with prioritising the organisational response to this attack. Whilst the incident unprecedentedly hampered our organisations ability to function at full capacity for an interim period, the recovery response to the attack has provided an opportunity to re-evaluate some of the systems and processes that we have in operation and ensure that any response implementations are reflective of the key principles of the Digitalisation Strategy.
- 6.2 A proposed delivery plan for the Digitalisation Strategy was also prepared, and a number of these tasks have already been accelerated as a result of the response to the cyber-attack. Conversely, it

has also meant that some aspirations are no longer a priority due to safeguarding requirements, at this stage. The IMT has reviewed the actions of the Strategy and noted that whilst timescales have changed, no actions currently require amending.

PRIORTIES

People and Place

- 7.1.1 A key focus of the Digitalisation Strategy is to ensure our communities have access to digital means and are sufficiently equipped to utilise it, helping reduce digital exclusion. Outreach work through Adult Learning services and their provision of digital literacy courses and application of the Social Practices approach which allows more tailored learning, is now underway. This has enabled increased digital capacity amongst our community and is supporting more bespoke usage of personal digital equipment and online applications which has also resulted in transferrable skills through to employment.
- 7.1.2 The Community Learning and Development team have led the Government funded scheme since COVID, to distribute Digital devices to help address inequalities and exclusion, ensuring that those most in need within our communities are in receipt of support, which has further been supported through school provisions.
- 7.1.3 Work within Education is ongoing through the Technologies strand of the Curriculum for Excellence, which focuses on growing digital literacy skills for our future generations. Delivery of increased online learning opportunities are also being explored in addition to existing provision.
- 7.1.4 Care Homes across the Outer Hebrides continue to engage in various new digital opportunities to enhance lived in experience of their residents, with connectivity and support available to assist residents with increased communications with family, friends and other organised groups, including the ability to participate in online interactive activity and information sessions. Operations within the Service are becoming more digitalised through engagement with residents, stakeholders and among staff communication and reporting processes.
- 7.1.5 Communication through Digital means has now become ingrained into daily lives, with every Comhairle service increasing their provision of digital accessibility and communication options to enhance engagement. A new corporate Customer Service Strategy is in development which uses digitalisation to underpin service delivery and a refreshed Communication Strategy, reflective of our current digital revolution has now been developed to ensure that how we engage with the wider community in this landscape remains fluid and accessible, in a controlled and secure manner.

Developing a Digital Economy

- 7.2.1 Whilst the cyber-attack had a significant impact to Comhairle services, it has also allowed the opportunity to accelerate some of the key priorities of the Digitalisation Strategy and ensure that the key Principles within the Strategy are embedded within the Comhairle's response to the attack and that services are reviewed and reimplemented in a more enhanced and streamlined offering.
- 7.2.2 A service-wide rollout of Microsoft 365 and training on usage is now available and support through the Digital Office is being explored to further enhance collaboration with other public sector services to enable more efficient and coordinated working relationships.
- 7.2.3 A survey on digital capacity amongst our workforce is underway with the opportunity for growing digital skills available to staff and Members to support more accessible methods of applications and engagement. This will be further enhanced by the pending appointments of Digital Champions within each section.

- 7.2.4 Businesses continue to be supported to increase their digital skills enabling additional online presence and services in a variety of ways to help businesses grow and increase resilience. A Comhairle-led initiative seeking installation of 5G small cells to be located at popular tourism destinations will aid communication and connectivity to help further promote our islands profile across a range of sectors.
- 7.2.5 Our digital connectivity infrastructure is still to be enhanced through the Government's R100 Programme, scheduled for delivery in 2026, though additional provision from Scottish Governments 4G Infill Programme has allowed for increased access in more remote areas, with the first 5G services now available in Stornoway.
- 7.2.6 Internal governance has been reviewed and the formation of an IT Working Group within the Comhairle is now nearing completion which will allow for closer working with representatives from each service, through appointment of Digital Champions. The Incident Management Team leading the recovery from the criminal cyber-attack has agreed to adopt and embed the priorities and principles of the Digitalisation Strategy ensuring all decisions and actions promote digital governance, culture and performance that has a streamlined, collaborative focus.

Technology and Services

- 7.3.1 In what has been an extraordinarily challenging year for the Comhairle's ICT department, a review of service provision has taken place, which includes enhanced access to remote cloud services in a way that is safe and secure. Provision to facilitate hybrid working and inclusivity is ongoing through increased rollout of staff laptops.
- 7.3.2 Work with key businesses, such as BT and The Cyber Fraud Centre is underway promoting resilience, and awareness of changing technology and cyber threats, along with the implementation of new security and technologies since the cyber-attack to ensure our digital security and resilience going forward with regular security training and briefings being undertaken. Work is also ongoing to support the transition to digital telephone lines.

DIGITAL OFFICE SCOTLAND

- 8.1 The [Digital Office Scotland](#) support local authorities with their digital transformation journeys. The Office aims to ensure that the infrastructure and capabilities are in place to help councils accelerate digital transformation and to deliver the ambitions of the National Digital Strategy for Scotland.
- 8.2 The Digital Office have been engaging all Local Authority members, which includes Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, in their collaborative aims to lead in the development of a number of common platforms that can be shared nationally. To date, these include: the [Cloud Platform Service](#); [MyAccount](#), [ScotAccount](#); and [Scotpayments](#). As a member of the Digital Office, the Comhairle has access to these platforms and is considering implementation across the relevant sections.
- 8.3 The Digital Office provides a Digital Support Hub that offers access, guidance and tools to digitalisation in organisations, along with courses on digital leadership, service redesign, AI, cloud, Cyber Data and security, with the Comhairle participating in a number of these opportunities.

CONCLUSION

9.1 The Digitalisation Strategy was developed to ensure our people, businesses and organisations are equipped to survive in a rapidly digitally focused world, whilst tackling the disparities and security issues that this also creates. Implementation of the Strategy could have been derailed following the unprecedented criminal cyber-attack that the Comhairle was victim to, however serendipitously, it has led to the acceleration of the embedding of the Strategy's principles and priorities being installed within the Organisation, with key work continuing to progress within our Communities and schools on supporting access and capacity to improve digital skills and harness the opportunities that come with this, across all sectors.

Action Plan Task	Status	% Complete	Monitoring
People and Place			
1.1.1 - identify baseline for digital awareness and capacity in our communities	Not Started	0	
1.1.2 Provide upskilling and reskilling digital opportunities in collaboration with other services in the Community	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adult learning services digital skills - Schools providing digital skills and identifying those without access - Community Learning and Development rollout of devices and links to support services
1.2.1 Provide equipment and digital skills in the community, to those identified as being in need	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adult learning services digital skills - Schools providing digital skills - Community Learning and Development rollout of devices and links to support services
1.2.2 Establish a Repair/ recycle scheme for unused IT equipment to increase access to those in need	Not Started	0	
1.3.1 Explore delivery of accessible multi-use Hubs within communities in co-operation with a range of sectors, including community groups	Not Started	0	
1.4.1 Use digitalisation opportunities to increase community engagement	In Progress	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated Comhairle Customer Services strategy completed - Community Learning and Development Team leading on developing Community Engagement Strategy
1.6.1 Identify and fulfil digital gaps in young people, in relation to literacy, learning and equipment	In Progress	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing as part of Curriculum for Excellence, digital attainment requirements - Distribution of digital devices to support accessibility
1.6.2 Explore and identify digital learning opportunities to increase educational provision where advantageous to learning experience	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of provisions and opportunities to increase curriculum offering through additional digital learning options remains ongoing - Continued provision of eSgoil locally and nationally
1.7.1 Investigate opportunities to streamline elements of services and staff time through digitalisation	In Progress	75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rollout and training on M365 and capabilities, including collaboration and efficiency - Embedding of digitalisation principles through IMT response to cyber-attack - Updated Communications and Customer Services strategies - Increased digital comms both internally and externally amongst all Comhairle services - Engaging with Digital Office on opportunities
Creating a Digital Economy			
2.1.1 Undertake a review of staff digital capacity	In Progress	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey of staff digital capacity underway
2.2.1 Provide training and upskill opportunities for all staff in digitalisation	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training on M365 available - Staff survey on digital skills underway
2.2.2 Departmental update of online content and services	Not Started	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delayed due to cyber-attack

2.2.3 Embed and actively promote digitalisation in Service redesign	In Progress	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adoption of digitalisation Strategy - Digital training provided to staff and Members - IMT adoption of digitalisation strategy priorities and principles
2.2.4 Embed digitalisation culture and working practices through awareness raising and digital opportunities	In Progress	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated corporate strategies (customer services/ communications/ organisational development) in alignment of Digital priorities and principles -
2.3.2 Appoint Digital Champions	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IT Working group convened to progress appointments within the Comhairle services
2.3.3 Digital training provided to Members	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All members offered training on Interplan, the Comhairle's Business Planning and Performance Management Framework. New guidance and training being prepared for Members on LearnPro.
2.3.4 Explore digital opportunities to increase councillor/ constituent engagement	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training programmes for Members underway
2.4.2 Build digital resilience within our businesses	In Progress	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A variety of digital courses are provided through Business Gateway
2.6.1 Undertake proactive engagement with Scottish and UK Governments to secure superfast broadband capabilities for all, in the Outer Hebrides	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocating for increased rollout of R100 - Establishment of 5G services in Stornoway - Exploration of innovative connection solutions, such as 5G small cells
2.6.2 Identify gaps in mobile and broadband accessibility for businesses	In Progress	75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of broadband and 3-5G access available
2.6.3 Explore local partnership interventions to deliver local broadband solutions	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repopulation Zone Working group discussing broadband issues in South Uist, developing option appraisals
Technology & Services			
3.1.1 Explore the utilisation and promotion of SG's common platform options to provide more streamlined access to online services for multi-service users	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Led by Digital Office, some platforms now available and being considered by relevant services i.e. myaccount
3.1.3 Collaborate with other councils/ Government to identify where common platforms and procurement can add value	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with Digital Office on initiatives
3.1.4 Undertake IT inventory with a view to supporting Smart desk spaces, and repair/ recycle opportunities	In Progress	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of office space underway - Desktop telephones removed - Rollout of laptops to staff to support flexible/ hot desk working options - All old hardware recycled as per WEE regulations
3.1.5 Explore cloud usage for services	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key department systems have been built in secure cloud infrastructure post cyber-attack
3.1.6 Support telephone IP Switchover	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IT are working closely with BT to ensure streamlined Comhairle digital changeover
3.1.7 Enhance cyber security and develop Recovery Strategy	In Progress	75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New technologies and recovery systems have been implemented post cyber-attack, with further cyber security improvements currently being put in place
3.2.1 Provide training and awareness of software package and their secure usage i.e. Microsoft Office 365	In Progress	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training on M365 now available - Cyber security training due to be rolled out imminently <p>Working with Digital Office on shared training platform</p>

3.3.1 Explore data and various ways this can be recorded, harnessed and utilised to improve service delivery	Not Started	0	
3.3.2 liaise with other services and organisations to determine possible areas to share and access data securely	In Progress	25	- Work ongoing with Digital Office to ease collaborative work with NHS and other public services on M365 platform
3.3.3 Engage with SG and other local authorities to develop Common Governance framework, covering data standards and ethics	In Progress	10	- Being led by Digital Office, work underway